

and if you take my hand by paladinscleric (schmulie)

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Summary:

Will doesn't show up at school. Mike is worried.

(result of the dialogue prompt: "i feel like i can't breathe.")

and if you take my hand

Author's Note:

i posted this on tumblr a while ago and thought why not put it on here, too. we need to fight back against the frankly disturbing amount of h*rringrove fics.

hope you enjoy!

"and if you take my hand
please pull me from the dark
and show me hope again.

we'll run side by side
no secrets left to hide
sheltered from the pain."

(So Far - Ólafur Arnalds)

Will was lying on his bed, wrapped in several blankets, starting to feel uncomfortably warm but he didn't want to move and throw one of the comforters off him. He was in that weird in-between state of consciousness, slipping in and out of sleep. Aware of his surroundings, of his body relaxing into the mattress, but also seeing weird images behind his closed eyes, hearing voices that weren't there - maybe memories, or the beginning of a dream.

That's why, at first, the knocking sound that suddenly started didn't register as something real. Incorporating itself into the scene currently unfolding in Will's head. It wouldn't stop though. Kept on and on. Changing the rhythm. Still insistent. Will furrowed his brow. Something was weird about this noise. Then he heard a muffled "Will!" and his eyes fluttered open. More knocking. And again, a shout of his name.

He sat up. Head spinning a bit, a stabbing pain right above his left eyebrow making him squeeze his eyes shut for a few seconds. When

the pain slowly subsided, got more bearable, he cracked his eyes open again, his gaze travelling over to the window where a lanky figure stood. Face pressed to the pane so his nose was squished against it, breath fogging up the glass in front of his mouth. Mike.

Mike... should be at school. What was he doing here? Did something happen to one of the party members? Will quickly threw back the pile of blankets and slipped out of bed. Pattering barefoot over to the window and opening it. "Oh, thank God!" Mike breathed, his posture visibly relaxing.

"M-mike? Wh-what?" Will's teeth were already chattering. His body, warmed up from his blanket burrito, was now being confronted with the biting cold December air. "What are you ... are you doing here?"

Mike uncoordinatedly climbed over the window sill, cursing when he bumped his head against the frame. "Oof. Well, I was - no, I got it, I can close it, I got it. Go back to bed, please, you are shaking - I was at school. But then... you weren't there."

Will slipped back under his covers while Mike closed the window and pulled off his shoes, coat, hat and scarf, throwing everything into a messy pile on the floor. He walked over to the bed in a couple of long strides and pointed at the empty space on Will's right side. "Can I?"

"Yeah. Yeah, sure", Will replied softly. Still a bit perplexed from Mike showing up unannounced and sweeping into his room without giving a real explanation.

"Mike, what's wrong? Is everyone okay? Is someone hurt?"

"What? No! No, Will! The others are fine!"

The others.

So Mike wasn't fine?

Will felt the mattress dip as Mike sat down and leant his back against the headboard, wiggling his feet underneath the heavy mass of

blankets. Mike let his head fall back against the wall with a soft thud and closed his eyes for a moment before sighing deeply and rolling his head in Will's direction. Gazing at him intensely before whispering. "You feeling bad again?"

"No!" Will exclaimed. So that's why Mike looked so worried? He thought Will was having trouble sleeping, breathing, living again? "Well I'm not feeling my best but. Mike. I'm just sick."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Woke up in the middle of the night feeling kinda feverish, so Mom forbade me to go to school today and ... yeah. I didn't really complain. English with Mr. Turner today. No thanks."

Mike gasped, acting shocked. "What?! Are you telling me you don't like the way his spit sometimes hits you right in the face when he comes too close to your desk during one of his monologues?"

"Eww," Will scrunched up his nose and lightly shoved Mike's shoulder. "Don't remind me, please."

Mike let out a short laugh but he quickly quieted down, looking solemn again.

"Mike?" Will asked softly, eyes trying to catch Mike's gaze but the other boy was stoically staring at his lap. "Why are you here?"

Mike sighed and it took several long moments for him to answer, his mouth opening and closing a couple of times, attempting to speak but seemingly not knowing how to start.

Will was just about to reach out his hand to stop Mike from picking at his nails, a telltale sign that he was nervous, when the dark haired boy cleared his throat and started talking, quiet and hesitant. "I... I just. You weren't in first period... and the others didn't know why you didn't show up either. Plus, I know today isn't a Dr. Owens day, so I... I just kind of... panicked. I guess. It sounds so stupid, now. Who freaks out when their best friend doesn't come to school for one day? It's so-"

“Hey! Mike, it’s not stupid!” Will interrupted him gently.

“But it is, Will!” Mike exclaimed, and finally looked over at Will with tears brimming in his eyes. “It is! The gate is closed. The shadow monster is gone! You are okay! I know all that but... but when you’re not there, when... when I don’t know *where* you are -” He took a shuddering breath. “When I don’t know if you’re *safe*, I...I feel like I can’t breathe. Like nothing’s going to be okay until I know you are fine. And... yeah. Ugh, it’s so stupid. I’m so sorry to burden you with this, I know you’ve got enough to worry about. God, I’m such a bad friend.”

“What?” Will nearly shouts, “Mike! You are the best friend I could ever wish for! Who else would skip school just to check up on me? Who else would have stayed by my side for three days. Three whole days, Mike! Even though I was... it wasn’t even really *me*. Don’t... please just don’t put yourself down like that. Okay?”

Mike just sniffled, looking back down at his lap, but a faint blush was colouring his cheeks and he gave a small nod.

“Sorry,” Will mumbled.

“Huh?” Mike looked at him, a confused frown on his face.

“I’m sorry for not telling you. That I’m sick. I mean... I could have called. I should have called but somehow I-”

“Hey, no no no! You have nothing to be sorry about, okay? This is just me being ridiculous, okay? And just... way too overprotective.”

“No but Mike, I... I understand. I understand that you are scared and that you freak out when I don’t show up. I mean, I’m scared when I don’t know where someone from the party is, if they are okay and I didn’t even... I wasn’t even here for the worst of it. You almost lost me twice and I- I can only begin to imagine what that must feel like.”

“Weren’t here for the worst of it?!” Mike exclaimed, appalled. “Will, you were in the goddamn Upside Down for a week and then you-”

“Mike,” Will interrupted him again. “Mike. It’s okay. We don’t need to compare our pain and suffering, yeah? Not a good competition to

have. I guess we both didn't have it too easy, did we?"

"No. Guess we didn't."

They looked at each other, soft smiles playing on their lips. Will could feel his cheeks heating up slowly, breath becoming uneven. Mike's face was so open, eyes soft and kind, a hint of sadness in the corner of his smile. The same expression he wore last Halloween, the two of them sitting next to each other on the couch in the Wheelers' basement. Two boys, crazy together, against the rest of the world.

Suddenly there was a hand on top of his - another flashback. Not a quite so pleasant one. The shadow monster already busy making a home inside his body and mind. But Mike had been there. Unwavering, stubborn, protective. A warm hand touching his own, if only for a brief moment. Grounding him, saying *Hey, I'm here. And you are, too. And together we can do anything.*

The touch was not so brief now, Mike's hand lingering as if waiting for something. Will dropped his gaze down to his lap, saw his friend's hand on top of his own. The sight made his stomach feel funny. He inhaled deeply through his nose, trying to summon up some courage. He reminded himself of Mike's soft smiles and kind eyes, his arm around Will's shoulder. He remembered the shed, and the single tear running down Mike's freckled cheek. *It was the best thing I've ever done.* He thought about Mike sitting next to him right now, and about all the things he had just said to him.

He exhaled slowly and began to turn his hand, his palm now aligning with Mike's. His head felt fuzzy, heart picking up speed. When Mike carefully slotted his fingers into the spaces between Will's he felt as if the butterflies in his stomach were breaking free at last, spreading out throughout his whole body. Everything tingling, blood rushing in his ears, heart beating so so fast.

When he finally felt brave enough to look up again he saw Mike looking equally as flustered, cheeks tinted red, teeth pulling his bottom lip into his mouth. Will's gaze was drawn to it; the way Mike's perpetually chapped lip glistened with spit when his teeth released it. Leaving it shiny and plumper than usual.

"This okay?" Mike mumbled and Will's gaze quickly snapped to his eyes, flush spreading from his face to his neck when he realised he had been caught staring.

Mike smiled. "Will?"

"Huh? Oh. Yeah. Sorry. Yeah, this is fine. Totally. *More* than fine actually. Uh, that came out weird. Right? Wasn't that weird? Oh my God, I'm totally making it weird, now. I'm sorry. Please make me stop talking! Please!"

Mike laughed, shaking his head fondly. "I think I shouldn't talk either right now. I'm so nervous, I wouldn't be able to stop rambling."

Will squeezed his hand. Somehow, knowing that Mike was as nervous as he was actually managed to calm him down a bit, gave him a bit more courage. He slowly leant his body towards the other boy, searching his face for any indication that this wasn't what Mike wanted after all. That Will read it all wrong. But Mike just looked at him with a soft, almost awed expression and leant forward as well. The two boys stopped their movements when their faces were barely an inch apart. Breath hitting the other's lips. A moment of stillness.

And then Mike moved, closing the remaining space between them, and pressed his lips softly against Will's. Eyes fluttering shut, hearts beating erratically, hands still clasped between them. Their lips moved softly against each other, with each other, and when Mike gently sucked on Will's bottom lip, the smaller boy was sure his stomach just did a somersault; every single one of his nerve endings tingling as he, in return, took Mike's plump bottom lip between his own, carefully pulling on it with his teeth, just a tiny bit, before releasing it and pressing another kiss to his mouth. And another. And another. And another.

Author's Note:

hope you liked it! comments are very much appreciated!

you can also come and say hi on [tumblr](#)

xx julie